

Arkadi Choufrine  
*Theophany as Light:  
A Background  
of Clement's Interpretation of  
the "Day" Abraham Was to See*

*If anyone does not receive [the light] while he is in this world, he will not receive it in the other place.*

—*The Gospel of Philip, 127 (trans. Wilson)*<sup>1</sup>

*Do not say that it is impossible to receive the Spirit of God.  
Do not say that it is possible to be made whole without Him.  
Do not say that one can possess Him without knowing it....  
Do not say that men cannot perceive the divine light, or that it is impossible in this age!*

—*Symeon the New Theologian, Hymn 27.125-7*<sup>2</sup>

Section A begins with my analysis of Philo's exegesis of the story of Abraham's conversion as a case study of Philo's idea of theophany as illumination.<sup>3</sup> I then look at the parallels, partly pointed out by Wlosok, between the illumination of Abraham in Philo and that of the Christian neophyte in Clement. I expand on Wlosok's analysis of Philo's idea of illumination, in particular, by giving a full picture of Philo's ontology of the Light operative in illumination (see Excursus F below).

Turning then to Clement's reading of the OT accounts of God's appearances to Abraham, I show that his reading not only depends on Philo's (as established by van den Hoek), but also drastically departs from

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<sup>1</sup>Daley, *Hope*, 28, comments on this passage: "In so far as we may speak of a single eschatological hope in Gnosticism at all, its heart is expressed here, in the promised continuity between the present enlightenment claimed by the sect and an eternal sharing in a saving, but largely hidden truth." What would, then, Daley say of the eschatology of the Orthodox saint cited as my next epigraph?

<sup>2</sup>Cited from Basil Krivocheine, *In the Light of Christ: Saint Symeon the New Theologian (949-1022): Life—Spirituality—Doctrine* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1986), 5.

<sup>3</sup>For my reconstruction of some premises of the idea of theophany as illumination in Philo, developing Abraham Bos's insights on Philo's Aristotelian background, see Excursus E below.

it by leaving out the idea of Abraham's illumination that Philo had read into the Scripture. This raises the question of Clement's possible reasons for such omission.

Section B begins with a detailed analysis of the passage in Clement's *Strōmateis* where he uses Gen. 15:6 in his argument against Basilideans and Valentinians on the possibility of salvation before Christ. I show that, contrary to Einar Molland's all too straightforward reading of this passage, it is far from clear from it alone whether Clement there argues that the Savior's advent has been absolutely necessary or merely advantageous for our salvation.

In the Excursus (B.1) that follows I look into Paul's use of Gen. 15:6—as a natural (on the par with Philo's) background for Clement's—through the eyes of modern scholars. Their diverging reconstructions of Paul's reading of that passage indicate that objectively there is an inner contradiction in his interpretation of it, stemming from his use of Abraham's case as a precedent for Christian salvation. This gives me methodological grounds to proceed in my next section (C) with my reconstruction of Clement's solution to this problem left by Paul.

To resolve the contradiction between the two interpretations of Clement's understanding of the Christ-event's role in the *Heilsgeschichte*, suggested, respectively, by Claude Mondésert and Molland, I begin section C with a close reading of *Exc.* 18, where Clement construes the Savior's descent into Hades as effecting illumination of Abraham and other OT righteous there. The scholars who followed Sagnard's attribution of *Exc.* 18 to Clement, which is now accepted and, as I show, correct, have not, to my knowledge, studied this passage. By collating it with other relevant second-century Christian passages, including those from Clement's *Strōmateis*, I demonstrate that for him the illumination in Hades is equivalent to Christian baptism.

I then look at Clement's idea of the Lord's "presence in the flesh" mentioned in *Exc.* 18, in light of his understanding of the Logos' "becoming flesh" (Jn. 1:14) in *Exc.* 19. The latter passage confirms Mondésert's view, based on *Ecl.* 23.1, that for Clement God's incarnation is co-extensive with the *Heilsgeschichte*. Just as theophany, the Incarnation thus is not limited to the time-span of Jesus' life on earth. Clement's construal of the Transfiguration (*Exc.* 4f) and the Sinai (*Str.* 6.32f) theophanies suggests, moreover, that for him a theophany is—just as it is for Philo—a manifestation of God as Light, and its cognitive correlate is

illumination. Since in the Jordan theophany a manifestation of divine Light took place according to a tradition probably known to Clement, it is on this tradition, rather than on a light-mysticism of the kind one finds in Philo, that Clement probably based, *pace* Wlosok, his idea of Christian baptism as illumination, given that for him this baptism was modeled on that of Jesus.

I conclude that the Light that illumined Abraham is for Clement—just as it is for Philo—the Logos present in Abraham’s own flesh, not the flesh of Jesus. Clement differs from Philo, however, in that for him Abraham sees this Light already in this life, whereas for Clement It is identical with the “Day” Abraham “was [first] to see” (Jn. 8:56) in Hades (*Exc.* 18).

In my section D, I demonstrate that Clement means by this “Day” not the Sabbath of the Lord’s descent into Hades, but the Lord Himself as God’s Logos. In *Exc.* 18 one thus finds a special instance of Clement’s use of the term “Day” as a christological title, which Daniélou (who, however, fails to take into account our passage) traces all the way back to Philo’s exegesis of Gen. 2:4.

I then look at *Exc.* 18 in light of Clement’s three other passages: the one on the Sabbath (in his *Strōmateis*), the one on the Everlasting Today (in his *Protreptikos*), and the one on the Last Day (in his *Paidagōgos*). This makes clear that Clement identifies the Light revealed in theophanies with both the pre-temporal Day One and the Eighth Day of Christian eschatology, which he construes, in a hidden polemic with Philo, as the true Sabbath. In baptismal illumination the neophyte is being made God’s son by participating in the eternal generation of this Light. Just as illumination in Hades, this “birth from above” in baptism (Jn. 3:3) coincides with the “resurrection on the Last Day” (Jn. 6:40). Such interpretation of the latter, first found in Clement, characterizes his eschatology as “realized.”

## **A. Clement’s revision of Philo’s idea of Abram’s conversion**

According to Wlosok, the idea of illumination integral to Clement’s interpretation of baptism first developed in Alexandrian Judaism as a philosophical (mis-)interpretation of Pentateuch theophany accounts.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Freilich sind die zeitreichen Theophanien, Gottesoffenbarungen und Berufungen, die die alttestamentliche Patriarchengeschichte enthält, keine Wesensoffenbarungen, sondern Kundgaben göttlichen Willens. Gerade diese Berichte des Pentateuch macht die hellenisierte alexandrinische Exegese zu Zeugnissen göttlicher Wesensoffenbarung und

According to this interpretation, the major experiential correlates of a theophany are awakening, acquiring sight, and seeing light, as described in, e.g., Philo's account of Abram's conversion from pantheism to the knowledge of the transcendent God:

Having opened his soul's eye as if after a deep sleep and begun to see the pure radiance (ἀύγην) instead of deep darkness (σκοτίους βαθέος), he followed the light (τῷ φέγγει) and discerned what he had not beheld before: a certain charioteer and pilot presiding over the world.... This his mental faculty (διάνοια) then, having looked up (ἀναβλέψασα),<sup>5</sup> saw for the first time. For before a great mist (ἀχλὺς) had been shed upon it by the things perceptible by the senses; having dispelled this mist by warm and fiery dogmas (δόγμασιν), it, with toil, managed to receive as in a clear open sky the apparition (φαντασίαν) of Him who in time gone by was hidden and invisible.<sup>6</sup>

My first chapter focused on one of the three experiential expressions of what Wlosok calls "philosophical Gnosis" that figure in this account, namely, awakening, as it functions in a Valentinian interpretation of conversion, on the one hand, and Clement's interpretation of baptism, on the other. The fact that in the passage just quoted the subject of this experience is Abraham, indicates that already Philo associated it with conversion. For, as has been convincingly argued, part of Philo's idea of Abraham is a projection back upon him of the proselyte of Philo's time,<sup>7</sup>

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Wesenserkenntnis, und deutet sie unter dem Einfluß des synkretistischen Platonismus als mysterienhafte Vereinigung des Menschen mit dem göttlichen Sein. Die alttestamentliche Gottesoffenbarung wandelt sich hierbei in eine pneumatische Gottesschau, die die höchste Stufe eines Geistmysteriums ist" (Wlosok, *Laktanz*, 60). Wlosok seems to overlook here the whole point of Philo's distinction between essence and powers in God, of which she is certainly aware (cf. *ibid.*, 86, referring to Philo, *Mut.* 15, cited in n.16 below; there Philo emphatically denies the very possibility of "Wesensoffenbarung").

<sup>5</sup>F.H. Colson's translation: "with its recovered sight" (*LCL*), implies that there had been a "pre-lapsarian" period during which Abram knew God; this would contradict both Philo's context and his probable source here, namely, Gen. 15:5 (καὶ ἔπεν αὐτῷ [ὁ θεός], ἀνάβλεψον δὴ εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν...).

<sup>6</sup>*Abr.* 70, 78f; trans. *LCL* modified; discussed in Wlosok, *Laktanz*, 81f. The change of Abram's name (Gen. 17:5) appears in *Abr.* 81 as directly bearing on God's *first* appearance to him (Gen. 12:7), which Philo thus seems to identify, in the passage just quoted, with the theophany of Gen. 17:1.

<sup>7</sup>Philo presents Abraham as "the standard (κανὼν)...for all proselytes" (*Virt.* 219; trans. *LCL*), that is, a model *par excellence* for potential converts to Judaism. Some scholars, in spite of this, assert that a mission to the Gentiles was not part of Judaism's agenda in

whose conversion to Judaism he describes in similar terms: “as if, though blind before, they had looked up (ἀνέβλεψαν) and had come from the deepest darkness (βαθυτάτου σκοτός) to behold the most radiant light (ἀνγοειδέστατον φῶς).”<sup>8</sup>

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Antiquity any more than it is today. According to the recent edition of Emil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (175 B.C.-A.D. 135)*, revised by Geza Vermes, Fergus Millar, and Martin Goodman, vol.3, pt.2 (Edinburg: T. & T. Clark Ltd., 1987), 879 n.25: “Most of [Philo’s] works...were probably intended for Jews, so that even when [he] sets out to advocate respect for Jewish tradition within a broadly Greek outlook, one can hardly regard his mission as overtly propagandistic.” Avigdor Tcherikover, “Jewish Apologetic Literature Reconsidered,” *Eos* 48 (1956), 169-93, had argued more explicitly that: (1) “Philo and other commentators on the Septuagint text are addressing readers of that text: there is no evidence that Greeks read the Jewish scriptures before the Christian era (in fact, there is much that shows their total ignorance of Jewish law, tradition, and history); and much of the commentary is devoted to explicating fine points of the cultic law which would be incomprehensible to non-Jews”; (2) “the aim of what polemics and apologetics there was, was not to convert Hellenes but to reclaim Jews tempted to Hellenize. Assimilation is always a problem for Jewish communities in the diaspora and the Alexandrian ‘apologists’ were praising Judaism in order to shore up their community against the hegemony of Greek culture” (cited from the paraphrase of Tcherikover’s article done by my colleague Jeniffer Reece for Professor Kathleen McVey’s seminar on Clement at Princeton Theological Seminary in Spring 1995). One drawback of this interpretation is that it leaves unexplained Philo’s view of Abraham as a paradigmatic proselyte. Knox seems to have been the first to derive an explanation from the contrast between the two forms of the Abraham legend: the Hellenistic, found in Philo, and the rabbinical. “[In the latter,] Abraham was predestined from before the Creation to repair the transgression of Adam (Ber. Rabba, 14 on Genesis 2:7).... [It thus tends] to eliminate any real quest for God on the part of Abraham. The theology of grace and predestination takes its place.... It reflects the attitude of those who have Abraham as their forefather.... The Hellenistic form reflects [a concern] to make converts...” [Knox, “Abraham,” 59f]. It is even more probable, however, that the rabbis have had the same concern, since, as shown by Sandmel, they depicted Abraham as not only “the father of all proselytes,” but also a missionary who converted many of them (Sandmel, *Philo’s Place*, 85). While agreeing with Knox that “in Philo Abraham is an exemplar of the proselyte,” Sandmel specifies that “the motif, frequent in rabbinical literature, that Abraham was the great missionary, is lacking in Philo...; [and] one may [thus] tentatively suggest that, with respect to proselytism, for the rabbis Abraham is the missionary *par excellence*, while for Philo he is the significant ‘convert’” (ibid., 104f n.9). Sandmel’s study thus only partly supports Wlosok’s claim, which she bases on it, that “in dem *Diasporajudentum* Alexandriens haben Bekehrungen *besondere* Aktualität” (Wlosok, *Laktanz*, 84 n.66; emphasis added).

<sup>8</sup>*Virt.* 179; trans. *LCL* modified. Ellen Birnbaum argues that, although “related to proselytes,” this passage does not “mention them specifically,” to support her claim that “Philo does not make any connection between proselytes and seeing God” (E. Birnbaum, *The*

The objective pole of conversion experience, namely, the Light seen, is so central to Wlosok's idea of "philosophical Gnosis" that she virtually identifies the latter with "illumination" (Erleuchtung), despite the fact that the term φωτισμός (used, as mentioned, by the Christians for baptism from early on<sup>9</sup>) does not occur in Philo in reference to either conversion or theophany.<sup>10</sup> Clement seems to have been the first to develop the Christian idea of conversion as culminating in baptismal φωτισμός along the lines of Philo's understanding of theophany; one finds this idea in Clement's description of the mediation of "the holy spirit" that follows baptismal "awakening" as:

...the admixture (κράμα) [to the baptisand's inherent sight] of the everlasting radiance (ἀγγής ἁίδιου), able to see<sup>11</sup> the everlasting Light (τὸ ἄιδιον φῶς); since the like is welcoming (φίλον) the like, so then the holy [spirit] is welcoming that from which the holy [spirit] is—which, indeed, is called "Light" (φῶς) in the proper [sense] (κυρίως).<sup>12</sup>

A parallel between Philo's Abraham and Clement's neophyte thus

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*Place of Judaism in Philo's Thought: Israel, Jews, and Proselytes* [Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1996], 205 n.36). Yet even she acknowledges elsewhere that "Virt. 179...expresses a sense of kinship toward people who turn to the worship of God, ostensibly proselytes" (ibid., 214 n.46). The fact, mentioned by Birnbaum (ibid., 205 n.36), that Philo does not speak of "Abraham as seeing God...in passages that depict him as proselyte," does not make it less certain that seeing God is for Philo constitutive of conversion, which, in turn, is precisely what makes a proselyte. Even today in Orthodox Judaism the proselytes have the status of the "children" of Abraham only, whereas the Jews by birth are Jacob's "children" as well. I had no chance to trace the origin of this distinction, but the fact that one finds its likely allegorical echo in Clement (ὁ μὲν γὰρ σπέρμα Αβραάμ, δοῦλοι ἔτι τοῦ θεοῦ, οὗτοι εἰσιν οἱ κλητοὶ υἱοὶ δὲ Ἰακώβ οἱ ἐκλεκτοὶ αὐτοῦ...—*Str.* 6.60.3) suggests that it goes all the way back to the nascent rabbinical Judaism of his time.

<sup>9</sup>See Chapter I, n.196, above.

<sup>10</sup>Indirectly, though, there is such a reference in a quote from Ps. 26:1 (LXX) in *Somn.* 1.75, cited in n.286 below.

<sup>11</sup>...ἰδεῖν δυναμένης. Harl (*SC*) translates: "c'est un onguent de clarté éternelle capable de fair voir..." apparently construing the passage as a reference to the rite of post-baptismal anointing. The meanings of κράμα and ἰδεῖν employed by Harl, however, are not attested by the dictionaries, which makes Stählin's interpretation: "Dadurch entsteht eine Mischung ewigen Glanzes, der das ewige Licht zu schauen vermag..." (*BKV*), appear as more plausible.

<sup>12</sup>*Paed.* 1.28.2.

suggests itself, only to confirm Wlosok's thesis of the Hellenistic Jewish provenance of Clement's theology of baptism. The "mist" of sense-perception, "dispelled" by the "warm and fiery dogmas" of the unwritten Law revealed to Philo's Abraham,<sup>13</sup> becomes, if this parallel is correct, the "mist" (ἀχλύς) of sins, "rubbed off" in the baptismal font by Clement's neophyte.<sup>14</sup> The effect of ensuing illumination on both is a transformation into a new being. An expression of this in the case of Abram is his change of name (Gen. 17:5). As Philo explains elsewhere, "such changes are the indelible impressions (χαρακτῆρες) of the powers... discernible by the mind alone."<sup>15</sup> These apparently are the very powers through which God is omnipresent to creation.<sup>16</sup> The "fountainhead" of these powers is the

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<sup>13</sup>As Sandmel points out (idem, *Philo's Place*, 107), Abraham's access to the Mosaic revelation was a no less fundamental problem for Philo than for Paul and the rabbis: "If Moses' Law was the divine law, how could Abraham (and the other patriarchs) have flourished without it? The rabbis solve the problem in their way by asserting that Abraham observed the Mosaic Law.... [Paul's] solution is to regard the [Mosaic] Law as having only temporal validity, beginning long after Abraham, and enduring until Jesus, at which time it was abrogated. Philo gives his own answer, an answer possible only in Greek and not rabbinic thinking: Abraham observed the law of nature...; the Law of Moses is the copy of the law of nature and...derives its specifications from those specific things which Abraham (and other patriarchs) did" (cf. *ibid.*, 108f). For Philo, in other words, "[t]he law [Abraham kept (Gen. 26:5)] was not the written law, but that which unwritten nature prompted him to do" (Sandmel, *Philo's Place*, 141); the Torah given later is in "harmony" with this "will of nature" (τὸ βούλημα τῆς φύσεως) (Philo, *Opif.* 3; trans. *LCL*).

<sup>14</sup>*Paed.* 1.28.1. Cf. Chapter I, n.117, above.

<sup>15</sup>Philo, *Mut.* 65.

<sup>16</sup>"For to suppose that the Deity approaches or departs, goes down (Gen. 11:5) or goes up...is an impiety.... No..., the lawgiver is applying human terms to the superhuman God, to help us, his pupils, to learn our lesson. For we all know that when a person comes down he must leave one place and occupy another. But God fills all things; He contains but is not contained. To be everywhere and nowhere is His property and His alone. He is nowhere, because He Himself created space and place coincidentally with material things, and it is against all right principle to say that the Maker is contained in anything that He has made. He is everywhere, because He has made His powers extend through earth and water, air and heaven, and left no part of the universe without His presence" (*Conf.* 134-6; trans. *LCL*; cf. *Migr.* 182). It is the revelation of this, otherwise unseen, presence—rather than of the One *who* is present—that constitutes illumination: "And so the words 'The Lord was seen by Abraham' (Gen. 17:1) must not be understood in the sense that the Cause of all shone upon him and appeared to him (ἐπλάμποντος καὶ ἐπαφαινομένου), for what human mind could contain the vastness of that vision? Rather we must think of it as the manifestation of one

Logos,<sup>17</sup> which also is the Light *par excellence*.<sup>18</sup>

The Logos acts on the soul as a coining stamp.<sup>19</sup> This happens already in its creation “according to the Image” (Gen.1:27): a reasonable (λογική) soul is like a coin “signed (σημειωθέν) and impressed (τυπωθέν) by the seal (σφραγίδι) of God, the stamp (χαρακτήρ) of which is the Eternal Word” (ὁ αἰδιος λόγος).<sup>20</sup> Likewise, any act of perception (re-)coins the soul by the image of the thing perceived.<sup>21</sup> It is by such a re-coining that the apparition (φαντασία) of the theophanic Light that illumined Abram produced as its indelible trace the alpha added to his name. What he perceived as Light was the very Logos that had been instrumental in his creation. This illumination, therefore, was, in fact, his re-generation.

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of the powers around It (τῶν περὶ αὐτὸ), the power of kingship, for the title Lord betokens rule and kingship” (*Mut.* 15; trans. *LCL* modified). On Philo’s idea of illumination, see also Excursus E below.

<sup>17</sup>... ἀπὸ δὲ τοῦ θεοῦ λόγου, καθάπερ ἀπὸ πηγῆς, σχίζονται δύο δυνάμεις, ἡ μὲν ποιητικὴ, καθ’ ἣν ἔθηκε τὰ πάντα καὶ διεκόσμησεν ὁ τεχνίτης, αὕτη θεὸς ὀνομάζεται ἡ δὲ βασιλική, καθ’ ἣν ἄρχει τῶν γεγονότων ὁ δημιουργός, αὕτη καλεῖται κύριος. ἀπὸ δὲ τούτων τῶν δυεῖν δυνάμεων ἐκτεφύκασιν ἕτεραι...—*QE* 2.68. Philo also refers to the Logos as the “place” (τόπος) of the ideas used by God as patterns for creation (cf. n. 294 below); and in one context, at least, he seems to construe these ideas as God’s powers: “so the world (κόσμος) of ideas would have no other place than the Divine Logos, which has set in order (διακοσμήσαντα) these things. For what other place could there be for Its powers” (*Opif.* 20; trans. *LCL* modified). Since for Philo, the Logos is, so to speak, the idea of ideas, it seems natural to infer that for him it also is the power of powers. Philo corroborates this by his interpretation of Gen. 28:11: the “place” Jacob “met” (*Somn.* 1.68) is the “Divine Logos, which God Himself has completely filled throughout with incorporeal powers” (*Somn.* 1.62; trans. *LCL* modified). Clement elaborates upon this idea by describing the Logos in *Str.* 4.156.2 as “the circle of all powers, while they are being rolled into one and unified.”

<sup>18</sup>See Excursus F below.

<sup>19</sup>*Gottessiegel*, discussed by Franz Dölger, *Sphragis: Eine altchristliche Taufbezeichnung in ihren Beziehung zur profanen und religiösen Kultur des Altertums* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1911), 66-9.

<sup>20</sup>*Plant.* 18; trans. *LCL*; cf. *ibid.*, 19.

<sup>21</sup>φαντασία δὲ ἐστὶ τύπωσις ἐν ψυχῇ ὧν γὰρ εἰσήγαγεν ἐκάστη τῶν αἰσθήσεων, ὥσπερ δακτύλιός τις ἢ σφραγὶς ἐναπεμάξατο τὸν οἰκεῖον χαρακτήρα ἡ κληρῶ δὲ εἰκῶς ὁ νοῦς τὸ ἐκμαγεῖον δεξάμενος ἀκρῶς παρ’ ἐαυτῷ φυλάττει, μέχρις ἂν ἡ ἀντίπαλος μνήμη τὸν τύπον λεάνασα λήθη ἀμυδρὸν ἐργάσῃται ἢ παντελῶς ἀφανίσῃ (*Immut.* 43; see also *Leg. All.* 1.30).



Clement, by construing baptism as re-generation,<sup>22</sup> also establishes a connection between the work of the Logos in, respectively, baptismal illumination<sup>23</sup> and creation. He also links the change of name that baptism involves with the idea of re-generation as re-coining:<sup>24</sup>

For each one of the passions is on us as a letter (γράμμα), and stamp (χάραγμα), and sign (σημείον).<sup>25</sup> Now the Lord marks (ἐνσημαίνεται) us with another stamp, and with other names and letters, faith instead of unbelief, and so forth.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>See Chapter I, n.169, above; cf. n.236 below.

<sup>23</sup>By the “Light” of baptismal illumination, Clement clearly means in *Paed.* 1.28.2 not a kind of radiation—which he there refers to as “the holy spirit”—but rather a luminary, construed as this spirit’s *source* (cf. *Str.* 6.138.2: τὸ...φωλς...ἀληθές [cf. *Jn.* 1:9]..., λαμπτήρος ἐπέχον τάξιν...), which, as Wlosok shows (*eadem, Laktanz*, 85-91, 151-4), both Clement and Philo identify with the Logos. The only two other occurrences of φωλς ἀίδιον in Clement (also in his *Paidagōgos*) point in the same direction. His “filtration” passage cited in my first chapter, ends by mentioning the neophytes’ “speeding back to the everlasting light, as the children towards their Father” (πρὸς τὸ ἀίδιον ἀνατρέχομεν φωλς, οἱ παῖδες πρὸς τὸν πατέρα—*Paed.* 1.32.1; cf. *Jas.* 1:17). The only other occurrence of the “everlasting light” in Clement is in the hymn attached to the *Paidagōgos*, which calls Christ Λόγος ἀένναος, αἰὼν ἀπλετος, φωλς ἀίδιον... (vv. 35-7).

<sup>24</sup>Cf. Dölger, *Sphragis*, 111-19 (“Die Taufe als Wiedergeburt oder Umprägung durch das Logos- oder Pneumasiegel”).

<sup>25</sup>Clement gives more details on the genesis and semiosis of passions in *Str.* 2: “/110.4/ “For of objects that are moved, some are moved by impulse and appearance (φαντασίαν), as animals; and some by transposition, as inanimate objects. And of things without life, plants, they say, are moved by transposition in order to growth, if we will concede to them that plants are without life. /111.1/ To stones then belongs a permanent state (ἔξωος). Plants (τὰ φυτά) have a nature (φύσεως); and the irrational animals possess impulse and perception (φαντασίαν), and likewise the two characteristics already specified. /2/ But the reasoning faculty (δύναμις), being peculiar to the human soul, ought not be impelled similarly with the irrational animals, but ought to discriminate appearances, and not to be carried away by them. /3/ The [demonic] powers (δυνάμεις), then, of which we have spoken hold out beautiful sights, and honours, and adulteries, and pleasures, and such like alluring phantasies before facile spirits; as those who drive away cattle, hold branches before them. Then, having beguiled those incapable of distinguishing the true from the false pleasure, and the fading and meretricious from the holy beauty, they lead them into slavery. /4/ And each deceit, by pressing constantly on the spirit, impresses (τυποῦται) its image (φαντασίαν) on it; and the soul unwittingly carries about *the image of the passion* (τὴν εἰκόνα τοῦ πάθους; cf. *1 Cor.* 15:49), which takes its rise from the bait and our consent” (trans. *ANF*, emphasis added). Cf. Chapter I, n.60, above.

<sup>26</sup>*Ecl.* 24.2f; trans. *ANF*.

Thus, for both Philo and Clement, illumination is not only a revelation of the Divine Light, but, also, an irrevocable—as the change of name that it involves suggests—transformation of the human being who thus comes to know God.

For Philo, an objective (ontological) effect of such an illumining epiphany (φαντασία) on Abram is his perfection (τελείωσις); its subjective correlate is faith, construed as his reward for learning by instruction the “warm and fiery dogmas” of the future Judaism.<sup>27</sup> The alpha added to Abram’s name is a mark of this faith in the one and only God, which he had lacked as any Gentile does, unless s/he becomes a proselyte.<sup>28</sup>

For Clement, likewise, the faith that renders a believer perfect (τέλειος)<sup>29</sup> is acquired through illumination, which constitutes, as does illumination for Philo, the consummation (τελειότης) of a catechetical instruction (μαθήσεως). In discontinuity with Philo, however, for Clement this first happens in baptism. It is only natural, then, that the fact that Abraham “believed God”—although it “counted to him for righteousness” (Gen. 15:6)—does not seem to imply for Clement Abraham’s perfection (which Philo’s Abraham achieves through being illumined<sup>30</sup>) in this life.

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<sup>27</sup> διδακτικῇ χρησάμενος ἀρετῇ πρὸς τελείωσιν (*Praem.* 27); δόγμασιν (*Abr.* 79). Clearly anachronistic in their application to Abram, these locutions rather betray a reference to the proselyte of Philo’s time.

<sup>28</sup> *Virt.* 178. The Gentiles “go endlessly astray in their search of the knowledge of [God]” because their “parents and nurses and tutors...impressed (ἐνεχόραζαν) [mythical fables] on their yet tender souls from their earliest years” (*ibid.*; trans. *LCL*). It is the imprints of these “fables” that the seal of the theophanic Light is to replace.

<sup>29</sup> *Paed.* 1.29.1.

<sup>30</sup> Sandmel shows this well: “God appears to men in either a triple vision, if the mind is only partly purified [*QG* 4.5f], or in a single vision if the mind is completely purified [*Abr.* 122; *QG* 4.2]. This can be stated, Philo tells us, in still another way. There are three classes of temperaments which get the divine vision in different ways. The lowest class sees the Power on the left, κύριος, the ruling Power. The intermediate class sees the Power on the right, θεός, the beneficial Power. The best class sees the form in the middle, *To On*. Temperaments of the best kind worship only *To On* [*Abr.* 125; *QG* 3. 41; *QG* 4. 4].... The sight of *To On* is the ultimate. Philo insists that Abraham received this best possible vision...the final, climactic sight [*Mut.* 3-6].... Initially, before he has become perfect, Abraham had not actually seen God. He had seen one of the Powers, the Royal [or Ruling] Power [*Mut.* 7-15]. While Abraham is progressing, his God is spoken of as *Theos*, the Creative or Beneficial Power.... That Abraham is a temperament of the best kind and that he saw the triple vision [of God coming into Abraham’s “soul-eye” attended by His two highest Powers, rulership and

Clement's departure from Philo on this point, moreover, appears as deliberate, since in his differing interpretation of Gen. 15:6 he uses Philo as a source:

*/Str. 5.8.5/* To Abraham, because he had believed, righteousness was reckoned. As he pursued philosophy which rises up [to the things] occurring across the air and remains in the air [to study the things] moving across the sky, this [man] was being called Abram, which translates "suspended father." /6/ But later, having looked up into the sky (ἀναβλέψας εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν) and seen either the Son in the spirit (as some explain it); or an angel in glory; or having otherwise observed that God is better than creation and all the order that is in it, he gets the additional [letter] alpha, [that is] the knowledge (γνώσιν) of the one and only God, and is spoken of as Abraham, having become from the student of nature (φυσιολόγου) a wise [man] and a lover of God. /7/ For they interpret [that name] as "the elect father of sound"—*sounds*, indeed, the word that has come into being; the *father* of this [word] is the mind; *elect* has been the mind of the studious [man] (σπουδαίου).<sup>31</sup>

Not only does Clement not mention illumination as a basis for Abraham's conversion, but he explicitly distances from the idea that Abraham in his lifetime saw the Son, which for Clement—just as for Philo—would mean the Logos<sup>32</sup> and thus, as indicated above, the Light. A passage further in the same book (in a section that also shows Philo's influence<sup>33</sup>) makes clear that it is the second of the three above-mentioned options, namely, that God communicated with Abraham through an angel, that reflects Clement's own view. Abraham stays in the region of becoming (ἐν γενέσει); this is why he sees "the place"—construed as that of the true (immutable) Being—only "from afar" (Gen. 22:4). For the same reason, the one who directly initiates him into the mystery of faith is a mere angel,<sup>34</sup> not the Son through the "holy spirit," as in Christian baptism, which

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goodness—*Sac. 59f*] as a single object is clear, Philo tells us, ... from the use of the singular in the ... text [*Abr. 131f*] ..." (Sandmel, *Philo's Place*, 179-82).

<sup>31</sup>Van den Hoek, *Clement*, 192f, has correctly established that this is a "[I]argely literal quotation" from Philo, *Cher. 4-7*, echoing a number of Philo's other passages, including *Abr. 82*.

<sup>32</sup>The Logos for Philo is God's πρωτόγονος υἱός (e.g., *Agr. 51*).

<sup>33</sup>*Str. 5.71.5-74.1*. For a dependence on Philo, *Post. 14-20* and, possibly, *Somn. 1.61-71*, see van den Hoek, *Clement*, 168-76.

<sup>34</sup>οἱ ἄγγελου προσεχωῖς μυσταγωγεῖται—*Str. 5.73.4*. Cf. Gen. 22:11.

Abraham's three-day journey, however, signifies for Clement.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>εἶεν δὲ ἂν καὶ αἱ τρεῖς ἡμέραι τῆς σφραγίδος μυστήριον, δι' ἧς ὁ τῶ ὄντι πιστεύεται θεός—*Str.* 5.73.2.

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This section above is excerpted by the author's permission from:

Arkadi Choufrine, *Gnosis, Theophany, Theosis: Studies in Clement of Alexandria's Appropriation of His Background*, Patristic Studies, ed. Gerald Bray, vol. 5 (New York: Peter Lang, 2002).

*Gnosis, Theophany, Theosis* comprises three case studies of Clement's interaction with the heterogeneous traditions integral to his Alexandrian background: Basilidean and Valentinian metaphysics of the Christ-event; Philo's Scripture exegesis; and Hellenistic ethical theory based on Aristotle's concept of *telos*. This book focuses on the three respective representative objects of interpretation that Clement shared with those traditions, namely: the rite of Christian initiation; Scripture narratives of primordial creation and God's revelation to Abram; and the Middle Platonic idea of human *telos* as "assimilation to God." By going back to the respective interpretations of these objects by those traditions, and then forth to Clement's appropriation of those interpretations, *Gnosis, Theophany, Theosis* presents him as a creative theologian and lays bare the inner structure of his synthesis.

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